



Earth Day Turning 30, Organizers Push Clean Energy

By Patrick Connole

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Earth Day turns 30 on April 22 when thousands of people are expected to converge on the National Mall to hear exhortations from organizers and celebrities for a renewed effort to transform America into a clean energy nation.

Celebrations are also planned around the country and world, in addition to the Washington event, which is to be chaired and emceed by actor Leonardo DiCaprio, Hollywood's earth ambassador and box office darling.

To kick off the official countdown on Tuesday, Energy Secretary Bill Richardson, Environmental Protection Agency head Carol Browner, lawmakers and environmental interest groups laid out an ambitious agenda for Earth Day 2000.

Denis Hayes, an Earth Day founder and chief architect of this year's gala, said much progress had been made on environmental policies since 1970, but much needs to be done for fighting the gravest threat yet: global warming. "Earth Day will not just be a call for clean energy, but a bold demonstration that we currently possess the technology necessary for responsible energy production and consumption," Hayes said.

The move to clean power encompasses a sweeping agenda, led by EPA efforts to force old, coal-burning power plants to meet stringent new clean air standards, to developing hydrogen-fueled vehicles, to Congress passing budgets with adequate funding for research and development, speakers said.

Browner said even now there were some in Congress who scoffed at the idea the globe was warming, despite international scientific evidence that temperatures were warming, threatening to unleash diseases once though eradicated and swell oceans and alter customary weather patterns across Earth.

"Climate change will really test our resolve as a people," Browner said. She also asked Congress to approve EPA's \$237 million request for its Clean Air Partnership Fund.

Hayes said to demonstrate the viability of clean air energy -- wind, solar, biomass -- the event on the Mall will be the largest such gathering fueled totally by alternative energy.

"The stage, exhibits and audio and video systems will be powered by solar, wind, microturbine and bio-diesel generated energy," Hayes said.

Organizers said in addition to DiCaprio, other performers and notables scheduled to join the event are musicians Carole King and David Crosby, actors Chevy Chase, Tom Arnold and Melanie Griffith and scores of sympathetic legislators.